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THE FREE LANCE



Written By JB Nicholas

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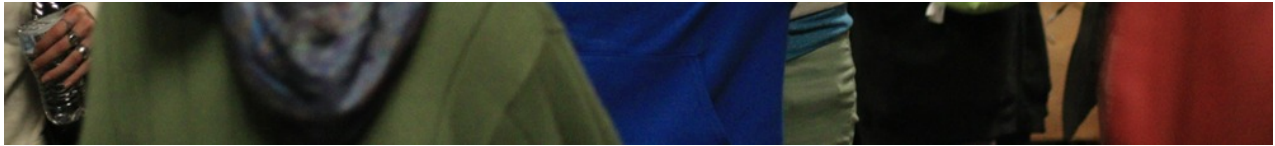
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Pro-Palestinian protester who occupied Hamilton Hall at Columbia University greets other protesters and supporters after being released on their own recognizance following a hearing at Manhattan Criminal Court, Apr. 2, 2024. Photo credit: JB Nicholas.

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The chair of a Congressional committee called them "Jihadists." Pres. Joe Biden accused them of being "anti-Semitic." New York City Mayor Eric Adams said they were duped by "outside agitators." The *New York Post* framed one as a "trust fund Anarchist."

But who, in fact, were the pro-Palestinian protesters who occupied a Columbia Univeristy campus building really?

Most were Columbia students or students at Columbia's all-female sister school, Barnard. Five were divinity students at Union Theological Seminary, also affiliated with Columbia—one is co-chair of the student senate there. Two worked for Columbia. Two previously worked for Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-Vt.). There's also two MFA students, a "Medievalist" and a literature professor.

One is the Lower East Side-version of Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg. One plays guitar, and published his music on SoundCloud. One took what he called a "crazy Disneyland ride across America"—after photographing more than 1,125 garment workers die in a factory collapse. One lives off-campus in the Palace of the Muses.

One previously sued the NYPD for false arrest and, in 2023, won \$15,001.00.

Despite the near-hysterical hyperbole aimed at them, the Columbia protesters aren't terrorists. No bombs or weapons—not even gasoline—were found in the building after Mayor Adams dispatched NYPD SWAT teams to arrest them less than 24 hours after the occupation began on April 30.

The NYPD's Intelligence Division investigated all of them and found no proof of any ties to terrorism or terrorists at all, multiple sources say. They looked at the protesters' families, their personal relationships and even their finances.

If the NYPD had found anything, at all, we'd be reading about in the NYPD's favorite newspaper: the *Post*. We are not.

Instead, a review of publicly-available information shows the group to be predictably smart, earnest, creative and diverse—that functioned together as an

effective group.

By the numbers, 45 people were arrested and charged by the NYPD for being inside Hamilton/Hind Hall, court records confirm. (A 46th was identified by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office, but no court record of the case exists.) All 45 are currently only charged with third degree criminal trespass. It's a class B misdemeanor—the lowest level of crime under New York law. It's punishable by up to three months in jail, a year of probation and/or up to a \$500 fine.

The oldest charged, the alleged Anarchist, is 40. (He's also a licensed lawyer, court records confirm.) The youngest is 20. Seven are in their 30s; the rest are in their 20s.

Most live in New York City. 19 gave police out-of-state home addresses (which may be just because they only had out-of-state identification). Sacramento, California was the furthest away, followed by Fresno. Baltimore, Memphis, Miami were other big cities protesters named. Four were from New Jersey. Two each came from Massachusetts, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. One came from Saxton River, Vermont. Another came from Independence, Kentucky.

A few took to the streets to protest the 2020 police murder of George Floyd in Minnesota. One was "kettled," thrown face-first to the ground and falsely arrested during the so-called Battle of Brook Avenue—when the NYPD arrested more than 250 peaceful Black Lives Matter protesters because they allegedly broke a COVID curfew imposed by Mayor Bill de Blasio.

That mass arrest, and others made by the NYPD after Floyd's murder, led to the largest civil rights lawsuit settlement payout in American history in 2023.



Anti-police brutality protesters, motivated by the police murder of George Floyd, on the Brooklyn Bridge, June 9, 2020. Photo Credit: JB Nicholas.

What happens next to the Columbia protesters who occupied Hamilton/Hind Hall in court will be determined by District Attorney Bragg. His office has said it is investigating the charges and talking with their defense lawyers about potential mitigating evidence. Prosecutors can drop the charges, add new ones or negotiate plea-bargain deals with defendants.

In New York City, defendants are usually offered Adjournments in Contemplation of Dismissal, ACDs, for minor offenses like class B misdemeanors. Meaning the charges get dismissed if the accused doesn't get arrested again for a period of time, usually six months to a year.

Accepting an ACD also means, however, that you cannot sue for allegedly being wrongfully arrested.

The protesters will have a better idea how prosecutors intend to handle their cases when the first of them return to court, starting next week.

MARIANNE ALMERO, 31, NY, NY

Graduate student at Columbia's School of Social Work. Earned her bachelor's degree at the University of California at Berkeley in 2019. There she "researched art-therapy as treatment for PTSD in collectivist societies," according to her bio on the website of the Urban Indigenous Collective, where she's a member.

The group's mission? "Indigenizing existing infrastructures."

RAIYA ALNSOUR, 26, BROOKLYN, NY

Ran track at Tuscarora High School in Leesburg, Virginia before working for Bernie Sanders and the American Postal Workers Union. Interned for the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government while a student at the University of Virginia. Established a chapter of the Resistance School at UV. Also worked with young women in Syria and interned at the Migrant Center for Human Rights.

AYA ARYAN, 20, FRESNO, CA

Environmental science major at Barnard. Class of '25.

ZACHARY BERMAN, 23, HEWLETT, NY

In addition to the Long Island address he gave to the NYPD, he is listed in public records as living in a 6,195 square-foot, \$2.5 million McMansion with five bedrooms in Westchester.

BENJAMIN BONNET, 29, NY, NY

Masters of Divinity student, class of '24, at the Columbia-affiliated Union Theological Seminary. Bonnet co-authored a 2022 research paper that examined "the growing involvement of New Mexico institutions of higher education in frontline worker recruitment in the DOE nuclear weapons complex."

ROSE BOTTORF, 21, DORCHESTER, MA

Class of '25 in Columbia's dual degree program with Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. Worked at both the European Institute of Policy Research and Murphy's Ice

Cream while studying overseas. Her Instagram epigraph: "All power to the people."

LAURA BROWN, 36, NORTH KINGSTON, RI

"Poets practice a freedom more dangerous," the present Union Theological Seminary divinity student and past farmer-poet wrote in *The Providence Journal* in 2020. Her first book of poetry, "Club Desire" (2022), is set in a strip club on the banks of the Providence River in Providence, Rhode Island, where, she described, "histories of extraction are undressed."

VIOLET BUPP-CHICKERING, 24, SAXTON RIVER, VT

Her hometown has a population of 479, according to the 2020 Census. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in neuroscience from the University of Vermont, where she won the Rodney Parsons Award for outstanding scholarship, leadership, and research. At Columbia, she works in the Simon John Lab, according to her LinkedIn. She's co-published at least two academic research papers on Schlemm's canal cells—which are central to ocular physiology.

A friend adjusts James Carlson's facemask as he leaves his arraignment at Manhattan Criminal Court after being arrested inside Hamilton Hall at Columbia University and released on his own recognizance. Photo Credit: JB Nicholas.

JAMES CARLSON, 40, BROOKLYN, NY

Alleged "trust fund Anarchist," heir to "ad empire" with Brooklyn "mansion, model babymama—and long rap sheet," according to the New York Post.

ETHAN CHOI, 21, NY, NY

Political science and government major, Columbia class of '25.

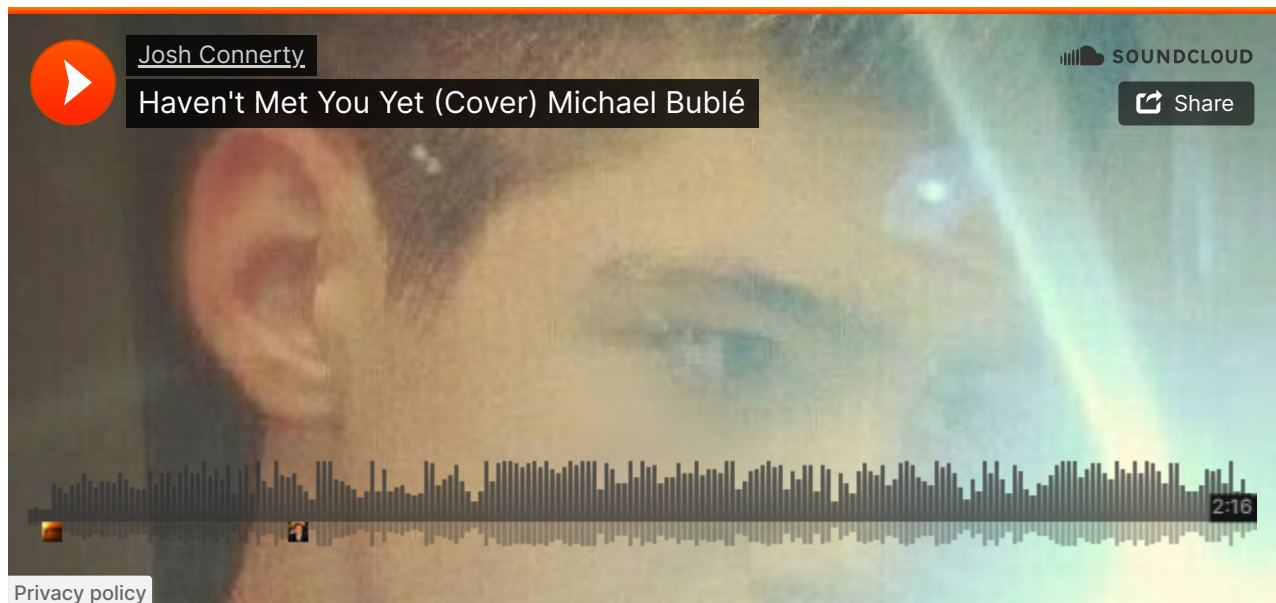
ELLIOT CHOI, 25, NY, NY

Hometown: Syosset, Long Island. Studied media, culture, communications and documentary at New York University. Scored a fellowship at Union Docs. He's "interested in post-colonial studies, marxist theory and religion in the United States."

JOSHUA CONNERTY, 25, PLYMOUTH, MA

Graduated from Trevecca Nazarene University in Memphis, Tennessee in 2021, lived on Mt. Rainier for a summer, bike-packed across Ireland, jumped out of an airplane with his father and moved to New York to earn a masters of divinity from Union Theological Seminary.

Connerty also plays guitar, and posted three songs, including his cover of Michael Buble's "Haven't Met You Yet," on SoundCloud.



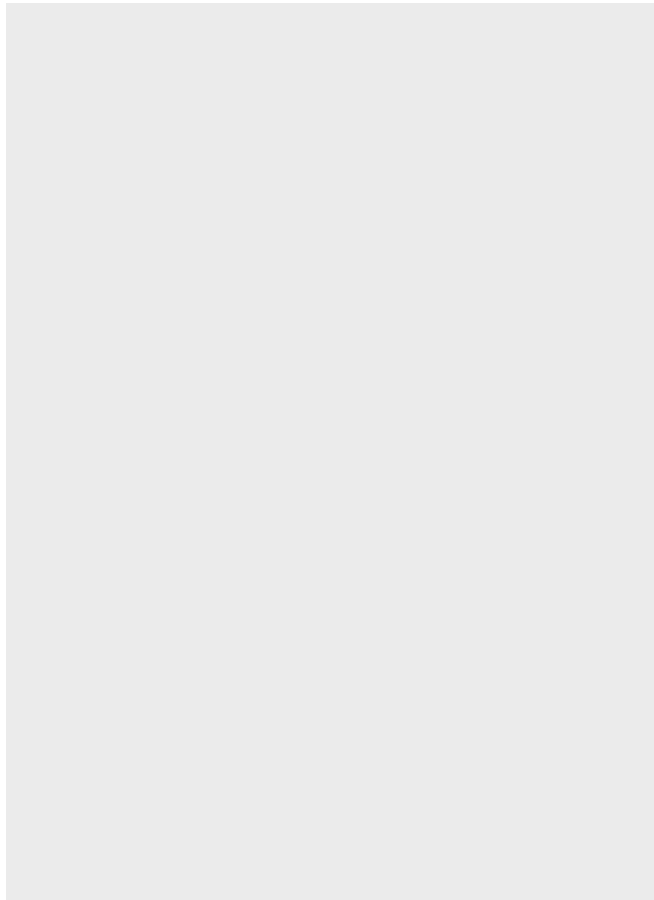
Josh Connerty · Haven't Met You Yet (Cover) Michael Bubl  

CATHERINE CURRAN-GROOME, 26, PRINCETON, NJ

Majored in basketball in high school before graduating with a political science degree from the University of Vermont in 2018. She interned for Bernie Sanders while she was there, then worked for People's Action. Her SoundCloud playlist is lit.

The high school basketball phenom's greatest earthly achievement appears to be

dunking on the NYPD with a federal civil rights lawsuit that paid her \$15,001.00 in 2023. That was for being kettled, thrown face-first to the street and falsely arrested during the Battle of Brook Avenue in 2020.



Curran-Groome stripping an opponent of the ball during a high school basketball game.

SEBASTIAN GOMEZ, 22, SPARTA, NJ

Applied physics major in Columbia's plasma physics lab.

"He plans to pursue a graduate degree in plasma physics and work towards mitigating climate change with clean energy. In his free time, Sebastian enjoys learning history, listening to rock music, and rewatching Star Wars," his school bio says.

Before the protests, he was "working on the assembly and operation of the pellet ablation experiment under the guidance of Professor Paz-Soldan."

CHRISTOPHER HOLMES, 25, INDEPENDENCE, KY

One of the five divinity students at Union Theological Seminary. An NYPD officer broke his eye socket arresting him.

"I was slammed downward to the ground and, when I turned my head to see if there were any comrades who needed assistance, an officer kicked me in the eye and I went straight down, and there was that buzzing and sharp ringing in the ears," Holmes told Reuters.

AALIYA HONG, 31, BALTIMORE, MD

Lives in a \$1m-plus, 5,859 square-foot town home in a leafy suburb, according to public records. The address she gave police is in a decent neighborhood 9 miles away in inner-Baltimore.

NAAY IDRIS, BROOKLYN, NY

Naay-Naay is not playin'. While she was studying for her master's at NYU, and working in the mailroom at Bobst library, she allegedly wrote "Free Palestine" on an empty mailbag with "Israel Postal Co. Ltd." printed on it.

Above "Israel," Naay allegedly wrote "Fuck."

NYU charged her with vandalism, but the charges were dropped after her union filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board.

The pro-Israeli Internet vigilantes who run an Internet blacklist called the Canary Mission haven't been so quick to forget. They put out an Internet version of a Mafia "hit" on her.

JULIA JACKSON, 26, LANCASTER, PA

Graduated Phillips Exeter Academy in 2016, volunteered in a hostel in the occupied West Bank in 2017, interned in the Philadelphia District Attorney's office, interned in the Legal Aid Society, graduated NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study in 2021 and tutors prisoners on Rikers Island through the Petey Greene Program.

Jackson also found time to volunteer for Bernie Sanders, for seven months. For fun, she rows crew, her LinkedIn says.

SEBASTIAN JIMENEZ, 21, PISCATAWAY, NJ

Received a scholarship from the Hoffen Family Scholarship Fund, established by the Jewish financier Howard I. Hoffen, according to Columbia's website. Jimenez was locked-out of his dorm, after his arrest, and had to sue to be temporarily allowed back in.

FRANZISKA LEE, 21, HAMDEN, CT

An english major with a minor in race and ethnicity studies. She interned for Play Co, an off-Broadway theater company in 2023. Lee too was banned from her Columbia dormitory after her arrest, and had to sue to get back in. She alleged the locks on her dorm were changed. She "had to stay with friends." She did "not have access to the majority of her belongings, such as her clothes and academic materials."

She told an interviewer she chose race and ethnic studies for a minor after taking an introductory class in her freshman year.

It was, she said, "the only department in Columbia where everyone was on board with, like, leftism and critical race theory." Lee added that meant "everyone starts with a base level of political awareness and concern, versus some other classes." Specifically, Lee observed Columbia requires core classes. All kinds of students with wide-ranging political views take the core classes.

Sometimes, she explained, that's "cool, in one sense, because you get to meet different kinds of people." But sometimes, "if you're trying to have a discussion about history or something, and people are like, 'Well, I don't think colonization is bad,' or something like that...It's like you can't get that far with that."

That's why, she said, "I like the Ethnic Studies department, because everybody is to an extent on board; you can argue at a level where it's productive."

TAYLOR LEE, 29, BROOKLYN, NY

International woman of mystery, or documentary filmmaker? There's too many Taylor Lees in New York to tell.

JINGYING LIN, 21, MIAMI, FLORIDA

Ran JV track at Miami Beach high school.

IBTIHAL MALLEY, 24, MEMPHIS, TE

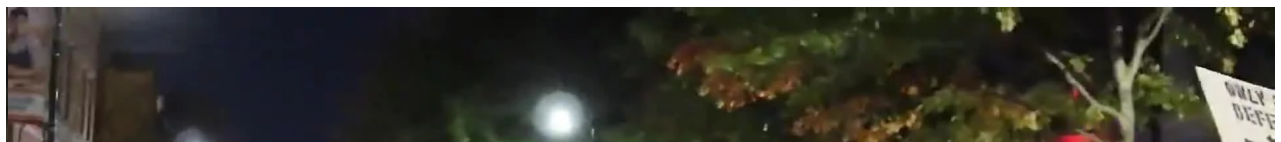
Blacklisted by the Canary Mission since 2018 for joining Students for Justice in Palestine and attending a conference, during her junior year at Barnard, according to the New York Times. Now she's earning a masters in Near Eastern studies at NYU. Her Instagram epigraph: "Free Palestine."

ELOISE MAYBANK, 21, NY, NY

Started high school at the Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle de Londres. Moved to the US. Graduated from the Milton Academy, established 1798, in 2021. Like Rose Bortorf, Maybank is class of '25 in Columbia's dual degree program with Trinity College Dublin.

MADELYN MCGUIGAN, 23, NY, NY

Wrote for *The Gavel*, the student newspaper at Boston College, where she was an International Studies student, before transferring to Barnard in 2020. Now an English major, she worked for the student literary journal, *The Meliora*. Speaks Chinese, volunteered as a tutor in East Harlem, waitressed in a bar in a seaside New Jersey town and was "awarded distinction" for her senior thesis, "Rip Van Winkle and the Disenfranchising Power of Antebellum Temperance Narratives."





NYPD using bicycles to "kettle" or trap pro-Democracy protesters in Greenwich Village the night of the 2020 presidential election, Nov. 4, 2020. Video credit: JB Nicholas.

RACHEL MENARD, 27, BROOKLYN, NY

Allegedly punched Assistant Chief Stephen Hughes twice in the face as Hughes was trying to arrest William Beaudoin in Greenwich Village during protests related to the presidential election on Nov. 4, 2020, the New York Post says.

A peaceful election rally in Washington Square Park turned into a roving demonstration as hundreds of people spilled into the streets. The NYPD responded by kettling protesters en masse after some lit a few garbage bags on fire. Cornored in a police kettle, some protesters reacted with force.

This was the night Devina Singh, then 24, infamously spit in an NYPD sergeant's face. 60 were arrested in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Two dozen were released on desk appearance tickets; 32 were given summonses.

Menard was released without bail. Court records don't say what happened to the charges; they were likely dismissed.

GRANT MINER, 27, SACRAMENTO, CA

Once dressed up as a Ghostbuster for Halloween.

Worked at *SacTown Magazine* before heading off to Kenyon College in Ohio before finally landing at Columbia in 2020. Calls himself a "medievalist." Studies in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, where he focuses on "medieval Iberia at the intersection of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic cultures," according to his Columbia biography.

Minor helps organize the Medieval Literature Colloquium, and is part of a planning committee for an anticipated Consortium of Medievalists, "a professional and

social group for medievalists in the New York metro area." Previously Minor "worked in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library as an archival worker on the Smith historical documents collection, and helped make over 1500 documents searchable from the library database."

Grant Minor (c) dressed as a "Ghostbuster." Photo credit: Minor via Facebook.

BRANDON MURPHY, 23, BRICK, NJ

Preacher's son.

AIDAN PARISI, 27, NY, NY

Columbia student who Columbia sicced private investigators on, before the occupation, and threatened to expel him if he didn't talk. Posted a photograph on his X account, formerly *Twitter*, of Pres. Nemat Shafik's letter declaring Columbia "will not divest from Israel" with the words "COLUMBIA WILL BURN" in red ink handwritten across it only minutes after Pres. Shafik published the letter. Occupied Hamilton/Hind Hall within hours.

ANIKA RAJU, 26, MECHANICSBURG, PA

Holds a BA in international affairs and political science from George Washington University. Studying for her MFA at Columbia. Wrote three articles for *Brown Girl Magazine*, which bills itself as the "media disruptor documenting South Asian stories and changemakers." Her *Brown Girl* bio says Raju is "passionate about racial justice, intersectionality, immigrant rights, and postcolonial theory."

ELIZABETH READE, 37, NY, NY

Adjunct professor of Classical and Modern Languages and Literatures at CUNY. Also taught at NYU's School of Professional Studies.

SOPHIA RICAURTE, 21, WESTLAKE, OH

Barnard student. Fan of the great Canadian poet Anne Carson ("Glass, Irony and God", "Autobiography of Red"). Follows Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Ma.) and Pete Buttigieg on *Medium*. Played tennis in high school. Won honorable mention in a teen poster contest in 2013.

ALESSANDRO ROMERO, 26, NY, NY

Columbia MFA student. Born in New York City to Philippine-born parents. Earned his BA from Sarah Lawrence. Taught English in a French fishing village on the English channel. Won the 2022 Matt Leone Fellowship from Colgate University. Says: "I hope to do my part in ensuring that queer immigrant stories go out into the world—to help pave reparative paths and new possibilities for my people."

REBECA SABNAM, 21, NY, NY

Columbia senior. Lives in the Jacob Riis Houses on the Lower East Side. Became a student environmental activist in 5th grade as part of a grassroots movement to replace styrofoam food trays commonly used in cafeterias, called "Styrofoam out of schools."

Made a Podcast as a high school senior called "Whitewashing of the Climate Movement." Profiled by Al-Jazeera in 2019.

"I am from Bangladesh, a country that exemplifies how interconnected the climate emergency is to racial justice and poverty," she said. "The climate crisis is not just an environmental issue, it's an urgent human rights issue."

CHARLES SADOWSKI, 23, WEST HAVEN, CT

Exceptional white boy from working-class Italian and Spanish neighborhood.

ATISH SAHA, 34, BROOKLYN, NY

Got his big break in life when a factory collapsed and killed at least 1,125 garment workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh on Apr. 24, 2013. Saha, then a news photographer, was there in minutes. His photographs appeared in newspapers, magazines, on websites and televisions world wide. He won the Overseas Press Club of America's

2014 Madeline Dane Ross Award.

The news release announcing the award noted Saha "had never flown on an airplane or traveled outside of his home country before his arrival in New York to attend the OPC Awards Dinner in April 2015." He stayed afterwards, and traveled cross-country on a Greyhound bus. He called it "a crazy Disneyland ride."

He scored a slot as a film student at Columbia's School of the Arts. DP'd a Bengali film, *Peyarar Subhash*, "The Scent of Sin." It premiered in 2023. In Moscow. Between classes, he photographed the pro-Palestinian protests on the campus since Oct. 7. Several of them have been published by New York City-based news organizations, including Hellgatenyc.com.



ANDREA SALAMANCA, 23, BROOKLYN, NY

Graduated in 2023. Was honored by Columbia for "outstanding commitment to diversity, social justice, and multiculturalism." Worked in an Italian sandwich shop after graduating.

SAMARRA SANKAR, 21, BELLMORE, NY

Barnard undergrad. Graduated high school, Brooklyn PolyPrep, in 2021. Works in the library's design center, where she has access to 3D printers, laser cutters and other fun tools. According to bio, "Samarra is an artist that primarily works with ink, but is currently branching out into sustainable art, eco-printing, and textile art! They believe that being able to create is a radical act and they are always excited to learn new skills."

LAYLA SHARIFI, 28, NY, NY

Lives in the Palace of the Muses. The Japanese/Iranian describe themselves as

"they/them," "fluid/bb" and in "nyc, lenape land."

JACKSON SMITH, 25, BROOKLYN, NY

Mysterious Bushwick Man.

BRIDGET SQUITIRE, 25, WEST ISLIP, NEW YORK

Started as a film student at Suffolk County Community College. Read Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" in 2018. Made a Public Service Announcement titled "Intrusive Thoughts" in 2019. Organized protests after the 2020 police murder of George Floyd. A man appeared to aim his car at demonstrators during one of them. Stayed a film major, moved to Brooklyn College, graduated 2022.

MOLLY STEINDORF, 27, NY, NY

High-school track star-turned-Latin American graduate student at Columbia. Previously a student at the Henry Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. Co-authored a report titled "Humanitarian Aid under Stress: Assessing the Role of NGOs." Among other things, the report argued for more "successful cooperation with armed groups."

While at UW, was stalked by a former friend of her mom, who tried to get her expelled.

PETER TANAKA, 35, NY, NY

Master of Divinity student at Union Theological seminary. Co-chair of the student senate.

GABRIEL YANCY, 24, BROOKLYN, NY

Graduate of Fordham University employed by Columbia as a neuroscience research assistant at its Zuckerman Institute.

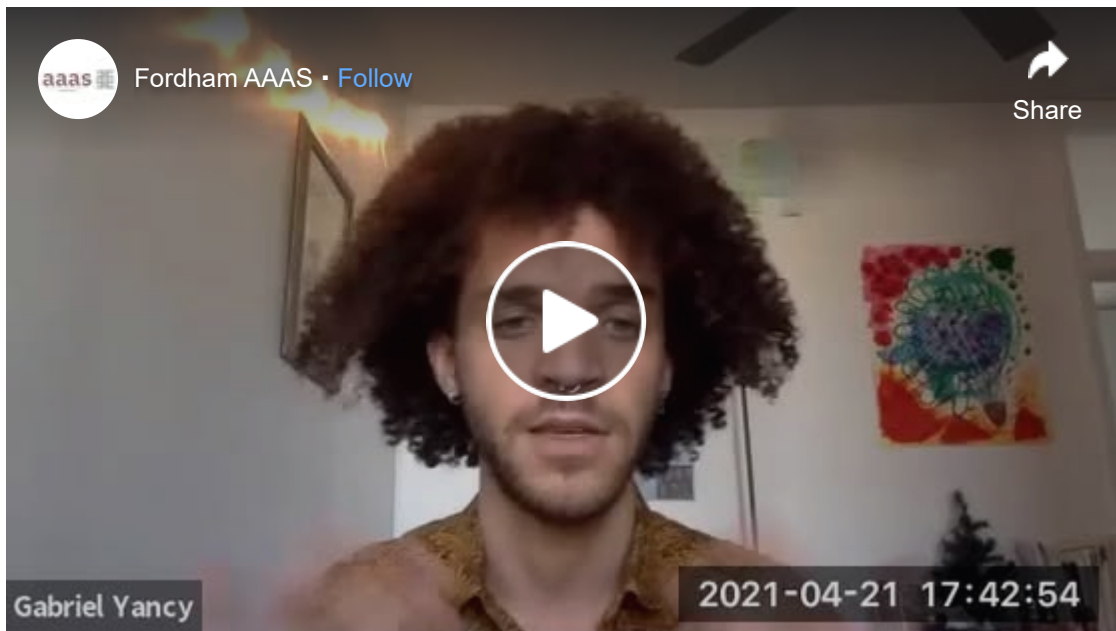
"We bring together an extraordinary group of researchers from across Columbia University, in a state-of-the-art facility, to transform our understanding of the brain and mind," the Institute's website says.

In a 2021 video made while he was still in Fordham, Yancy discussed campus activism. Students, he said, were usually only around their schools for four years.

"That's really not that long enough, in most cases, for these students to really be making any substantial changes," Yancy said. "So the changes, in terms of actual social justice stuff, needs to come from those who have more long-standing relationships with these communities and with these spaces."

That meant, Yancy explained prophetically, "The administrators. And the faculty."

Columbia fired Yancy after his arrest.



TIFFANY YANG, 31, BROOKLYN, NY

At her arraignment, prosecutors said they may want to use something Yang allegedly yelled at police, when they arrested her inside Hamilton/Hind Hall, as evidence against her if prosecutors don't drop the charge and she decides she wants a trial.

It was this: "Free Palestine!"

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